

JULIAN MACQUEEN

WRITER AMETHYST STRICKLAND

An Ever-Broadening Success Story...

Reclining on a comfy black leather sofa, I watched a subtle breeze blow across the putting green; Pensacola player Julian MacQueen was to meet me at any moment in the lobby of his Jet Center. Once Mr. MacQueen arrived, I found him to be pleasantly down-to-earth, especially considering his impressive resume: over 30 years experience in the hotel industry; Vice President Pigeon Forge, TN Tourism Bureau; 2004 Honorary Commander of 33rd Fighter Wing, Eglin Air Force Base; former Executive VP of Family Inns Of America, and Founder/CEO/Chairman of Innisfree Hotels, inc. just to name a few.

PHOTOGRAPHER BETHANY LAUREN

JULIAN ABOARD HIS
VINTAGE 1943
GRUMMAN WIDGEON
SEAPLANE



The Jet Center was designed to “exceed” expectations.



The Jet Center (designed primarily as a luxury accommodation for incoming private pilots) was opened 1.5 yrs ago to marry Julian’s love of aviation with his love of the hospitality industry. The Center, located off JerryMarygarden Street behind the Pensacola Airport, is meant to serve a dual purpose- to act as a “sale center” in providing guests with information on condo availabilities, and to extend the experience of each guest to the moment they step off the plane. The décor is extravagantly minimalistic; smooth curves and chrome accents give the space the almost aerodynamic quality that was no doubt intended. Julian said that he aimed to “exceed expectations” and he certainly has, from the flat screen TVs, Wii and fireplace to the gourmet chef, gym and lot full of muscle cars available to each guest; the Jet Center is as one patron put it, “A++++” accommodation.

Julian MacQueen, originally from Birmingham, Alabama, got his start in the hotel industry bussing tables at the age of 15. He worked for Hyatt for 5 years but in 1982, after having done just about every job in the business, he agreed to a venture that would change his life. A man out of Pigeon Forge, TN offered to mentor Julian in the hospitality industry, and give him stock in the company, in exchange for filling his 17 hotels for the World Fair. Julian not only filled those 17 hotels, but he also opened 5 new ones within 5 years. Then, in 1985, Julian founded Innisfree, a top tier hotel management and development company.

Innisfree was inspired by Yeats poem “The Lake Isle of Inn is Free”, which describes the tranquil escape that Julian seeks to provide each guest. Julian utilizes his S. Alabama Psychology degree in creating “a safe environment for people to express themselves and be all that they can be.” He explained his business philosophy as trying “to build a safe, trusting and fun environment...because if it’s not fun, it’s not worth doing!” One

big way he’s accomplished this is by building a principled, passionate and loyal staff (average tenure is 15 years) who view work as a service to mankind: a chance to change people’s lives.

Innisfree has some exciting projects in the works. The Pensacola Beach Holiday Inn is set to open spring 2011, next to the Hilton Garden Inn, the tallest hotel on the beach and Julian’s favorite project so far. In addition to the hotel, there are plans to develop the surrounding 21 acres of waterfront property with shops, and a 46 slip marina linked with a boardwalk. This development is unique in possessing both sound side and gulf side access. Innisfree (partnering with Hyatt Hotels & Resorts) also recently announced plans to embark on a \$24 million development project centered by a new 127 room Hyatt Place hotel. The Hyatt, opening in 2011, will connect to the Pensacola Gulf Coast Regional Airport (the 7th busiest airport in the state) and serve as an anchor for the many new shops and restaurants that will soon embellish the terminal area.

When asked where he sees Pensacola in the next 5-10 years, Julian is optimistic in his predictions. Although the city has seen some hardships in the form of political division and natural disasters, Julian views these challenges in a positive light, saying, “because of our past, the potential for our future is greater”. He points out the many qualities Pensacola has to offer, from the nearby Interstate-10 and stunning beaches to a competitive healthcare system and a rich historical legacy. He says of his optimistic outlook, “it’s a concept, and it’s one of the things that drives me.” Drive is certainly not a quality lacking in Mr. MacQueen; he’s proven his faith in Pensacola’s potential through the over 225 million dollars he’s invested into the commu-

nity. Julian MacQueen is doing his part to stimulate the local economy; he plans to spend 50 million dollars over the course of 18 short months in constructing The Pensacola Beach

hotel sector is down 30-40%, Innisfree has remained stable, both economically and morally. He may have created an empire in the process but Julian’s primary goal remains the



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Holiday Inn. He’ll also be alleviating some of the city’s unemployment by hiring 500 people for the construction phase of The Hyatt Place; once completed, the hotel will hire 235 permanent staff members as well.

Even in an economy where the

same, to create a life changing experience for his guests. He compares visiting a hotel to visiting a theater, “People are going to experience something, it’s our job to make it a good something”.